Shots Fired at White House Correspondents' Dinner

April 26, 2026 **by Dan McCue < https://www.thewellnews.com/custom-authors/dan-mccue/>**

The scene at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner immediately after a gunman attempted to storm the event. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — Inside the cavernous ballroom of the Washington Hilton Hotel, the sound of more than 2,000 journalists and dignitaries making small talk had reached a crescendo.

Saturday night marked the 112th year the White House Correspondents' Association had celebrated the press and the First Amendment with an annual lavish dinner.

Even President Donald Trump, often seen as a foe of the press, seemed to be enjoying himself as he leaned over and spoke with the association's president, Weijia Jiang, of CBS News.

Then came the sound of gunfire, just outside the main entrance of the ballroom: Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop Pop.

A moment later, the very strong smell of spent gunpowder wafted into the room.

By then of course — in less time than it took to turn from the sound at the door back to dais — the President, First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President JD Vance, and White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt — a week away from having her second child — had all been swept away, out of potential danger.

Reporters and photographers and other guests, meanwhile, had hidden under tables, though the vast majority of the former — the reporters and photographers — quickly climbed out of their sheltered places and began doing their jobs, documenting the scene.

In one corner of the room attendees chanted "USA, USA" as the remaining administration officials were taken from the room by security personnel.

The accused gunman, who was carrying a shotgun, pistol and knives when he was apprehended by Secret Service and other law enforcement, has been identified by The Associated Press as 31-year-old Cole Thomas Allen of Torrance, California.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said on CBS's "Face the Nation" Sunday morning that officials believe the suspect traveled by train from California to Chicago and then on to Washington, where in recent days he checked in as a guest at the Washington Hilton.

Law enforcement officials said after a preliminary examination of the dinner attacker's electronic devices and writings, they believe

he intended to target the administration members in attendance.

What ensued was a chaotic scene in which the suspect ran past security barricades and the metal detectors used to screen guests and was tackled to the ground during an altercation that resulted in shots being fired.

One officer was shot in a bullet-resistant vest but was recovering, officials said.

The entire incident transpired mere feet from the entrance through which hundreds of the association's members and guests had just passed.

Blanche said the suspect — who has not been officially identified by the authorities — is not being cooperative with investigators and is expected to face multiple charges on Monday.

He is currently facing at least two firearm-related charges, including one count of assaulting an officer with a deadly weapon.

They still do know the motive behind his actions.

Immediately after the incident, the gunman was taken to a local hospital for evaluation, though he did not appear to have sustained any significant injuries in the scuffle with law enforcement.

This year's White House Correspondents' Association dinner — long one of Washington, D.C. 's glitziest events, sometimes lovingly called the "nerd prom" — was already being especially watched as it was the first time since Trump became president that he had attended.

After being taken from the stage, Trump was held for a short time in a secure presidential suite at the hotel as Secret Service worked to ensure he could leave the hotel safely, and the president initially urged that the night's events continue.

In a post on Truth Social while reporters were still grappling with what had just transpired outside the ballroom, Trump said, "Quite an evening in D.C. The Secret Service and Law Enforcement did a fantastic job.

"They acted quickly and bravely. The shooter has been apprehended, and I have recommended that we 'LET THE SHOW GO ON' but, will entirely be guided by Law Enforcement."

After a halting attempt to resume the event, Trump again posted to Truth Social, announcing that "law enforcement has requested that we leave the premises, consistent with protocol, which we will do, immediately."

He also announced that he would be giving a press conference in the White House press briefing room within 30 minutes, and confirmed that the first lady, vice president and cabinet members in attendance had not been injured.

"We will be speaking to you in a half an hour. I have spoken with all the representatives in charge of the event, and we will be rescheduling within 30 days," he said.

A short time later, a clearly still shaken Jiang appeared on the stage, paying tribute to her fellow journalists for immediately leaping into reporting mode after the incident transpired.

"We will do this again," she promised.

At the White House, Trump observed that "today we need levels of security that probably nobody has ever seen before.

In the same breath, he added, ""We're not going to let anybody take over our society."

FBI Director Kash Patel, who was standing alongside the president on the briefing room podium, said the agency is examining a long gun and shell casings recovered from the scene, as well as interviewing witnesses from the dinner.

He urged anyone with information to come forward.

In the meantime, questions are being raised about the security precautions at the event, despite steps that included blocking vehicle access on several streets around the hotel, the deployment of multiple law enforcement and National Guard personnel, the barricades inside, and the personnel deployed to monitor entrance and egress to the various parts on the event.

On Sunday, the president again was on Truth Social.

"What happened last night is exactly the reason that our great Military, Secret Service, Law Enforcement and, for different reasons, every President for the last 150 years, have been DEMANDING that a large, safe, and secure Ballroom be built ON THE GROUNDS OF THE WHITE HOUSE," Trump wrote.

"This event would never have happened with the Militarily Top Secret Ballroom currently under construction at the White House," he continued. "It cannot be built fast enough! While beautiful, it has every highest level security feature there is plus, there are no rooms sitting on top for unsecured people to pour in, and is inside the gates of the most secure building in the World, The White House.

"The ridiculous Ballroom lawsuit, brought by a woman walking her dog, who has absolutely No Standing to bring such a suit, must be dropped, immediately. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with its construction, which is on budget and substantially ahead of schedule!!!" the president wrote.

When the attending members of the press were eventually asked to leave the building, they were guided away from the doors nearest where the incident occurred and led out a side door, up two sets of escalators, and finally, out of the front of the hotel.

Outside the hotel, members of the National Guard and other authorities flooded the area as helicopters circled overhead, and attendees in black tie and evening dress dispersed into the surrounding neighborhoods to redirect their Uber rides or find other means of getting home.

On Sunday afternoon, the association's president released a statement on the previous evening's events.

"Last night's shooting at the Washington Hilton was a harrowing moment for everyone in attendance," Jiang said.

"We express our deepest gratitude to the U.S. Secret Service and all law enforcement personnel who ensured the safety of everyone in the ballroom and beyond. Their actions protected thousands of guests, and we wish a full and speedy recovery to the officer who was injured in the line of duty," she continued. "We are grateful everyone in attendance was unharmed, including the President, the First Lady, and the Vice President.

"Our dinner exists to celebrate the First Amendment and the hard daily work of the journalists who defend it," Jiang said. "Last night, those journalists showed exactly the kind of calm and courage that work demands, jumping into reporting immediately after the incident unfolded. We are proud of everyone in that room.

"The WHCA board will be meeting to assess what happened and determine how to proceed. We will provide updates as soon as any are available," she added.

Also commenting on the night's evenings was the White House News Photographers Association, which said it stands in solidarity with the WHCA.

"We are deeply grateful to law enforcement and the U.S. Secret Service for their swift response in securing the scene and keeping all in attendance safe," said Jessica Koscielniak, the organization's president.

Koscielniak continued by commending "brave and dedicated colleagues picked up their cameras under such extraordinary circumstances."

"Their commitment is a powerful reminder of the essential role visual journalism plays in keeping our world informed," she said.

Saturday's incident was the third time since 2024 that the president had been under threat by an attacker in his immediate vicinity — including the assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, that injured him and killed a local firefighter.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot by John Hinckley Jr. outside a side entrance to the Hilton — an event that prompted redesigns of the property that increased security and added the special presidential suite near the entrance where chief executives could be taken.

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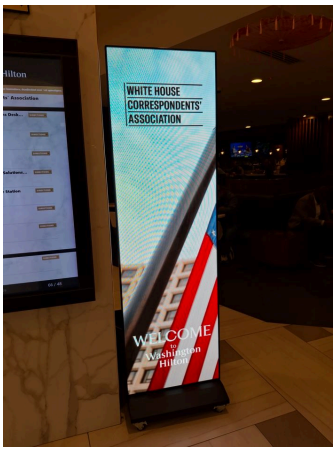
Below are scenes captured at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner before and after the incident. Photos by Dan McCue.

POLITICO
CBS NEWS

DISTRICT

WHCA

POLICE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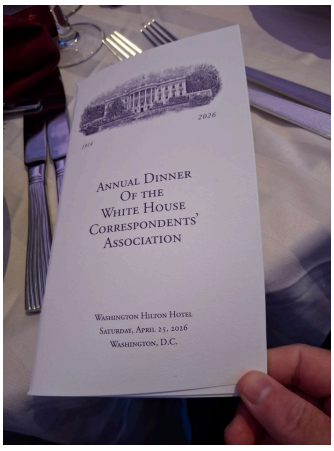
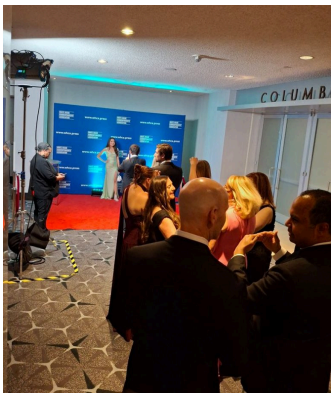

Annual Dinner
Of the
White House
Correspondents'
Association

DISTRICT

WHCA

White House Correspondents' Association Dinner
Reception Invitations or Dinner Tickets Required
to Access All Receptions


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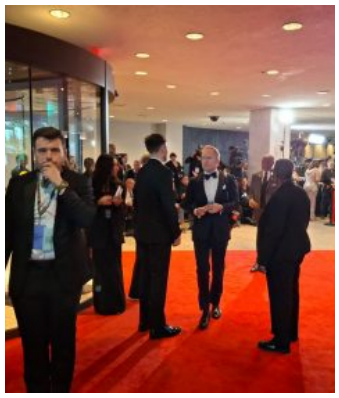
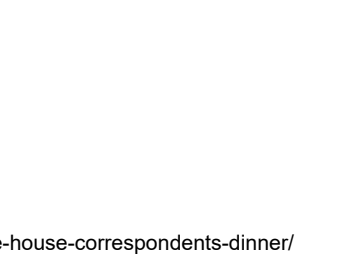
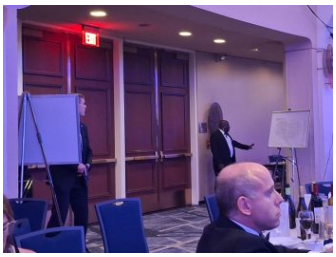


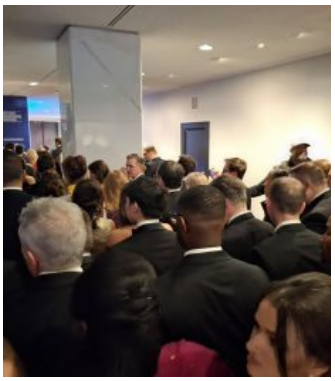
White House Correspondents' Association Dinner
General Reception

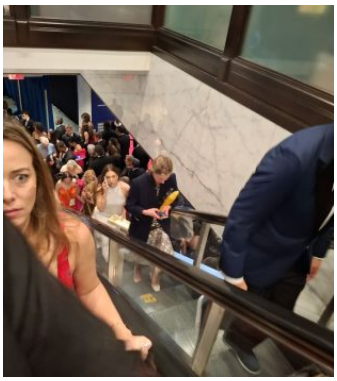
WHITE HOUSE
CORRESPONDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

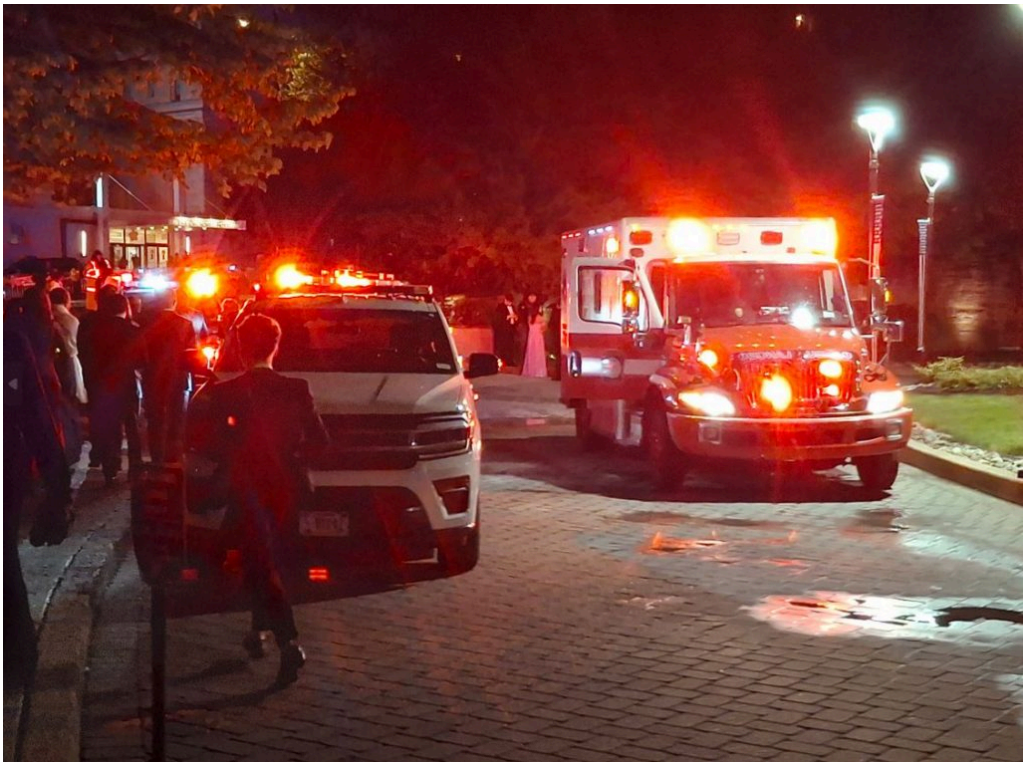
WHITE HOUSE
CORRESPONDENTS'
ASSOCIATION











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